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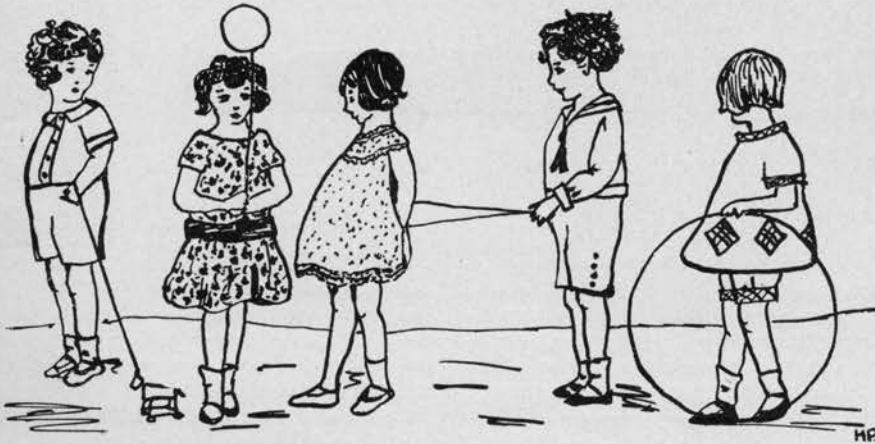


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An Old Maid's Tho'ts on Children

By An Old Maid

I put the dog out and shoved the cat out of my great grandmother's rocking chair (cats do so like to snooze in your best and easiest chairs), and now I take pen and paper to write in my copy-book script about children. Throughout the ages all folks have declared that no one knows better how to bring up children than an old maid. I can see many grains of truth in that statement. Theories and philosophies are much nicer than practices and sciences. There is an ethereal quality to a theory which no practice can ever hope to attain. Thus it is with old maids and children.

In this days of Fords (I myself drive a model "T") and airplanes, the one stylish family, like unto that of the "old woman's who lived in a shoe who had so many children she didn't know what to do," are very old-fashioned. 'Tis but farmers and poor white trash that beget children at the rapid rate of our fathers, and the intelligenzia look down scornfully on them, they, with their improved methods of birth control.

In the old-fashioned days, children were born into a miniature world where they combatted with other little human beings, fought for their rights, won and lost many wars. The home was a battle field royal, and parental favors were shared with the multitude. Now, children are brought up in a hot house atmosphere, with one or two other little plants. They get from doting parents the charming and delightful, but in time very disillusioning idea that the world revolves around them. It is the job of parents to run their child or children successfully through the preliminaries of life and give them their all-important introduction to the world.

Children are scamps, imps, savages; but we all love 'em. They careen madly

over your pet potato patch in a war dance; throw stones at your best beloved parrot sunning himself in the back yard, or tie tin cans to sweet Tabby's tail, the pride and glory of her Angora life. All these crimes and many more can young innocence perpetrate. They have infinite sympathy when it is played up by a clever adult, but, without thought, can be very cruel and relentless. Dwarfs, cripples and other deformed humanity fascinate children; their remarks and their stares probably cause these poor folk more mental anguish than from any other source.

Punishment for children is necessary. Having the child go to bed, think the crime over, and making clever individual punishments for the special crimes, are probably the best procedure. Whipping is really nothing short of capital punishment. "Spare the rod and spoil the child." This old, old adage with which parents have excused their violence and comforted their consciences does not hold good in most cases. However, I can conceive of a child that is so tough, hard, mulishly stubborn, unruly, that beating with rod and lash is the only way of making the slightest impression. I think these children are rare.

"Don't's" seem to completely hem in a child's horizon, "don't's" taking the joy out of life. Don't put your finger in your mouth; don't wrinkle your dress; don't stand on one foot; don't make a noise, don't slam the door, don't—don't—don't. Always "don't's" and really so many of them unreasonable. If "don't's" were only reasonable and logical they would merely be facts which had to be met in the course of a day, not mountainous irritations. Adults should take the trouble to have reasonable

"don't's" which they are willing to explain, and few of them.

The "do's"—! Ah, what a clever parent it takes to cunningly, with subtle strategy, make these "do's" charmingly intriguing. "Do's" are healthy and health-giving. There should be many of them, both of the play and of the work variety. Yes, the parent who handles his "do's" and "dons" well is the parent who is truly successful and whose children are the happiest.

That childhood is the happiest of times is, I suppose, true. In reality it is a time of tears, where laughter lurks beneath; sorrows encountered and quickly forgot; insignificant things which loom big, but blow over.

The child and the journalist carry the same keys to knowledge—the eternal questions, how, what, when, where, why, and who said it. They desire to know things about: God, the birds, the trees, the bees, the ants, the stars, the universe, which we adults with our limited knowledge and high conceit have to bluff through.

"God has a red nose like Santa Claus, hasn't he?" said my little nephew with all the positive knowledge of a four-year-old, his big brown eyes wide with seriousness. I, being a mere adult, who had never seen either God or Santa Claus and so could not form a precise opinion, kept a golden silence, discreet in its goldenness. Why cram down his neck my own narrow ideas? His were as good as mine and no one would ever truly know the correct answer. Adults do have a disgusting, conceited habit of cramming their ideals, opinions, philosophies and religion down the necks of their unwary young. The young do have to make their own decisions and the parent should be responsible for only the groundwork of the decision, not the decision itself.

There are people, and their number I think, is surprisingly large, who are not fitted for parenthood, and my advice to them, the advice of an old maid is don't have children. The advice is sound and practical, even if I say it myself. Children in this day and age cannot successfully, as Topsy, just grow. They need delicate, sympathetic cultivation and care.

Tabby rubs purring against the tops of my buttoned shoes (the acme of style in my girlhood days), jealous of my thoughts on children which have usurped my gentle ministrations to the soft fur on the nape of her neck. The dog, Prince, howls at the door. The fire in the grate spits fitfully and is snuffed out by a blast of cold air from down the chimney. Only the embers glow warmly. These are my thoughts, as a childless old age rushes in upon me.